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## THE FOX'S HEART.

PLINY says that by eating the palpitating heart of a mole, one acquires the faculty of divining future events. In "Westward Ho!" the Spanish prisoners beseech their English foe, Mr. Oxenham, not to leave them in the hands of the Cimaroons, for the latter invariably ate the hearts of all who fell into their hands, after roasting them alive. "Do you know," asks Mr. Alston in the *Witch's Head*, "what those Basutu devils would have done if they had caught us? They would have skinned us, and made our hearts into *mouti* (medicine), and eaten them, to give them the courage of the white man." Ibn Verga, the author of a sixteenth century account of Jewish martyrs, records the following strange story. "I have heard that some people in Spain once brought the accusation that they had found, in the house of a Jew, a lad slain, and his breast rent near the heart. They asserted that the Jews had extracted his heart to employ it at their festival. Don Solomon, the Levite, who was a learned man and a Cabbalist, placed under the lad's tongue the holy name. The lad then awoke and told who had slain him, and who had removed his heart with the object of accusing the poor Jews. "I have not," adds the author of the "Shebet Jehudah," "seen this story in writing, but I have heard it related."

I have the authority of Dr. Plöss for the statement that among the Slavs witches produce considerable disquiet in families, into which, folk say, they penetrate in the disguise of hens or butterflies. They steal the hearts of children, in order to eat them. They strike the child on the left side with a little rod; the breast opens, and the witches tear out the heart, and devour every atom of it. Thereupon the wound closes up of itself, without leaving a trace of what has been done. The child dies either immediately or soon afterwards, according as the witch chooses. Many children's illnesses are attributed to this cause. If one of these witches is caught asleep, the people seize her, and move her so as to place her head where her feet were before. 'On awaking, she has lost all her power for evil, and is transformed into a medicine-

woman, who is acquainted with the healing effects of every herb, and aids in curing children of their diseases.

The foregoing are two or three of the stories that I have noted down on the gruesome subject of heart-eating. I have not come across any passage in the Jewish Midrashim which ascribes to "heart-eating," even in folk-lore, the virtue of bestowing wisdom. Aristotle seems to lend his authority to some such notion as that I have quoted from Pliny, when he says, "Man alone presents the phenomenon of heart-beating, because he alone is moved by hope and by expectation of what is coming." As George H. Lewes remarked, it is quite evident that Aristotle could never have held a bird in his hand. The idea, however, that eating the heart of an animal has a wisdom-conferring virtue does seem to underlie a very interesting Hebrew fable published by Dr. Steinschneider, in his *Alphabetum Siracidis*. This story has already been ably discussed by Dr. Gaster (from whom some of my references are taken); but I translate it into English for the first time. The angel of death had demanded of God power to slay all living things. "The holy one replied, 'Cast a pair of each species into the sea, and then thou shalt have dominion over all that remain of the species.' The angel did so forthwith, and he cast into the sea a pair of each kind. When the fox saw what he was about, what did he do? At once he stood and wept. Then said the angel of death unto him, 'Why weepest thou?' 'For my companions, whom thou hast cast into the sea,' answered the fox. 'Where, then, are thy companions?' said the angel. The fox ran to the sea shore [with his wife], and the angel of death beheld the reflection of the fox in the water, and he thought that he had already cast in a pair of foxes, so, addressing the fox by his side, he cried, 'Be off with you!' The fox at once fled, and escaped. The weasel met him, and the fox related what had happened, and what he had done; and so the weasel went and did likewise.

"At the end of the year, the leviathan assembled all the creatures in the sea, and lo! the fox and the weasel were missing, for they had not come into the sea. He sent to ask, and he was told how the fox and the weasel had escaped through their wisdom. They taunted the leviathan, saying: 'The fox is exceedingly cunning.' The leviathan felt uneasy and envious, and he sent a deputation of great fishes with the order that they were to deceive the fox, and bring him before him. They went, and found him by the sea-shore. When the fox saw the fishes disporting themselves near the bank, he was surprised, and he went among them. They beheld him, and asked, 'Who art thou?' 'I am the fox,' said he.

'Knowest thou not,' continued the fishes, 'that a great honour is in store for thee, and that we have come here on thy behalf?' 'What is it?' asked the fox. 'The leviathan,' they said, 'is sick, and like to die. He has appointed thee to reign in his stead, for he has heard that thou art wiser and more prudent than all other animals. Come with us, for we are his messengers, and are here to thy honour.' 'But,' objected the fox, 'how can I come into the sea without being drowned?' 'Nay,' said the fishes; 'ride upon one of us, and he will carry thee above the sea, so that not even a drop of water shall touch so much as the soles of thy feet until thou reachest the kingdom. We will take thee down without thy knowing it. Come with us, and reign over us, and be king, and joyful all thy days. No more wilt thou need to seek for food, nor will wild beasts, stronger than thou, meet thee and devour thee.'

"The fox heard and believed their words. He rode upon one of them, and they went with him into the sea. Soon, however, the waves dashed over him, and he began to perceive that he had been tricked. 'Woe is me!' bewailed the fox, 'What have I done? I have played many a trick on others, but these fishes have played one on me worth all mine put together. Now I have fallen into their hands, how shall I free myself? Indeed,' he said, turning to the fishes, 'now that I am fully in your power, I shall speak the truth. What are you really going to do with me?' 'To tell thee the truth,' replied the fishes, 'the leviathan has heard thy fame, that thou art very wise, and he said, I will rend the fox, and will eat his heart, and thus I shall become wise.' 'Oh!' said the fox, 'why did you not tell me the truth at first? I would then have brought my heart with me, and I would have given it to king leviathan, and he would have honoured me; but now ye are in an evil plight.' 'What! you haven't your heart with you?' 'Certainly not. It is our custom to leave our heart at home while we go about from place to place. When we need our heart we take it; otherwise, it remains at home.' 'What must we do?' asked the bewildered fishes. 'My house and dwelling place,' replied the fox, 'are by the sea-shore. If you like to carry me back to the place whence you brought me, I will fetch my heart, and will come again with you. I will present my heart to the leviathan, and he will reward me and you with honours. But if you take me thus, without my heart, he will be wrath with you, and will devour you. I have no fear for myself, for I shall say unto him: My lord, they did not tell me at first, and when they did tell me, I begged them to return for

my heart, but they refused.' The fishes at once declared that he was speaking well. They conveyed him back to the spot on the sea-shore whence they had taken him. Off jumped the fox, and he danced with joy. He threw himself on the sand, and laughed. 'Be quick,' cried the fishes. 'Get your heart, and come.' But the fox answered, 'You fools! Begone! How could I have come with you without my heart? Have you any animals that go about without their hearts?' 'You have tricked us,' they moaned. 'Fools; I tricked the angel of death, how much more a parcel of silly fishes.'

"They returned in shame, and related to their master what had happened. 'In truth,' he said, 'he is cunning, and ye are simple. Concerning you was it said (Prov. i. 32), The turning away of the simple [the MS. reads פְּרָאִים] shall slay them.' Then the leviathan ate the fishes."

Metaphorically, the Bible characterises the fool as a man "without a heart," and it is probably in the same sense that modern Arabs describe the brute creation as devoid of hearts. The fox in the narrative just given knew better. Not so, however, the lady who brought a curious question for her rabbi to solve. The case to which I refer may be found in the *Responsa* Zevi Hirsch. Mr. Schechter kindly drew my attention to the passage. Indeed, my indebtedness to him is too great for words. Hirsch's credulous questioner asserted that she had purchased a live cock, but on killing and drawing it, had found that it possessed no heart. The rabbi very properly refused to believe her. On investigating the matter, he found that, while she was dressing the cock, two cats had been standing near the table. The rabbi assured his questioner that there was no need to inquire further into the whereabouts of the cock's heart.

Out of the crowd of parallels to the story of the fox's heart supplied by the labours of Benfey, I select one given in the second volume of that learned investigator's *Pantschatantra*. A crocodile had formed a close friendship with a monkey, who inhabited a tree close to the water side. The monkey gave the crocodile nuts, which the latter heartily relished. One day the crocodile took some of the nuts home to his wife. She found them excellent, and inquired who was the donor. "If," she said, when her husband had told her, "he feeds on such ambrosial nuts, this monkey's heart must be very ambrosia itself. Bring me his heart, that I may eat it, and so be free from age and death." Does not this version supply a more probable motive than that attributed in the Hebrew story to the leviathan? I strongly suspect that this latter fable has been pieced together from various sources,

and that the account given by the fishes, viz., that the leviathan was ill, was actually the truth in the original story. The leviathan would need the fox's heart, not to become wise, but *in order to save his life*, just as the fox had done on his own behalf. To return, however, to the crocodile. He refuses to betray his friend, and his wife accuses him of infidelity. His friend, she maintains, is not a monkey at all, but a lady-love of her husband's. Else, why should he hesitate to obey her wishes? "If it is not your beloved, why will you not kill it? Unless you bring me its heart, I will not taste food, but will die." Then the crocodile gives in, and in the most friendly manner invites the monkey to pay him and his wife a visit. The monkey unsuspectingly consents, but discovers the truth, and escapes by adopting the same ruse as that employed by the fox. He asserts that he has left his heart behind him on his tree.

That eating the heart of animals was not thought a means of obtaining wisdom among Jews may be directly inferred from a passage in the Talmud (*Horayoth*, fol. 13b). Among five things there enumerated as "causing a man to forget what he has learned," the Talmud includes, "eating the hearts of animals." Besides, in certain well-known stories in the Midrash, where a fox eats some other animal's heart, his object is merely to enjoy a tit-bit.

One such story in particular deserves attention. There are three versions of it, so far as my reading has gone. The one is contained in the *Mishle Shualim*, or "Fox-Stories," by Berechya Hanakdan (No. 106), the second in the *Hadar Zekeinim* (fol. 27b), and the third in the *Midrash Yalkut*, on Exodus (ed. Venice, 56, a). Let us take the three versions in the order named.

A wild boar roams in a lion's garden. The lion orders him to quit the place, and not to defile his residence. The boar promises to obey, but next morning is found near the forbidden precincts. The lion orders one of his ears to be cut off. He then summons the fox, and directs that if the boar still persists in his obnoxious visits, no mercy must be shown him. The boar remains obstinate, and loses his ears [one had already gone?], and eyes, and finally is killed. The lion bids the fox prepare the carcass for his majesty's repast, but the fox himself devours the boar's heart. When the lion discovers the loss, the fox quiets his master by asking, "If the boar had possessed a heart, would he have been so foolish as to disobey you so persistently?"

The king of the beasts, runs the story in the second of my three versions, appointed the ass as keeper of the tolls. One

day king lion, together with the wolf and the fox, approached the city. The ass came and demanded the toll of them. Said the fox, "You are the most audacious of animals. Don't you see that the king is with us?" But the ass answered, "the king himself shall pay," and he went and demanded the toll of the king. The lion rent him to pieces, and the fox ate the heart, and excused himself as in the former version.

The *Yalkut*, or third version, is clearly identical with the preceding, for, like it, the story is quoted to illustrate the scriptural text referring to Pharaoh's heart becoming hard. In this version, however, other animals accompany the lion and the fox, and the scene of the story is on board ship. The ass demands the fare, with the same *dénouement* as before.

What induced the fox to eat the victim's heart? The ass is not remarkable for wisdom, nor is the boar. Hence the wily Reynard can scarcely have thought to add to his store of cunning by his surreptitious meal. Hearts, in folklore, have been eaten for revenge, as in the grim story of the lover's heart told by Boccaccio. The jealous husband forces his wife, whose fidelity he doubts, to make a meal of her supposed lover's heart. In the story of the great bird's egg, again, the brother who eats the heart becomes rich, but not wise. Various motives, no doubt, are assigned in other *märchen* for choosing the heart; but in these particular Hebrew fables, it is merely regarded as a *bonne bouche*. Possibly the Talmudic caution that eating the heart of a beast brings forgetfulness may have a moral significance; it may mean that one who admits into his soul bestial passions will be destitute of a mind for nobler thoughts. This suggestion I have heard, and give it for what it may be worth. As a rule, there is no *morality* in folk-lore; stories with morals belong to the later and more artificial stage of poet-lore. Theological folk-lore, of course, stands on a different basis.

Now in the *Yalkut* version of the fox and lion fable, all that we are told is "the fox saw the ass's heart; he took it, and ate it." But Berechya leaves us in no doubt as to the fox's motive. "The fox saw that its heart was fat, and so he took it." In the remaining version, "the fox saw that the heart was good, so he ate it." This needs no further comment.

Of course, it has been far from my intention to dispute that the heart was regarded by Jews as the seat both of the intellect and the feelings, of all mental and spiritual functions, indeed. The heart was the best part of man, the fount of life; hence Jehuda Halevi's well-known saying, "Israel is to the world like the heart to the body." An intimate connection

was also established, by Jews and Greeks alike, between the physical condition of the heart and man's moral character. It was a not unnatural thought that former ages were more pious than later times. "The heart of Rabbi Akiba was like the door of the porch" (which was twenty cubits high), "the heart of Rabbi Eleazar ben Shamua was like the door of the temple" (this was only ten cubits high), "while our hearts are only as large as the eye of a needle." But I am going beyond my subject. To collect all the things, pretty and the reverse, that have been said in Jewish literature about the heart would need more leisure, and a great deal more learning than I possess. So I will conclude, for the present, with a quotation, pathetic as well as poetical, from a Jewish mediæval chronicle.

A Mahomedan king once asked a learned rabbi why the Jews, who had in times long past been so renowned for their bravery, had in later generations become subdued, and even timorous. The rabbi, to prove that captivity and persecution was the cause of the change, proposed an experiment. He bade the king take two lion's whelps, equally strong and big. One was tied up, the other allowed to roam free in the palace grounds. They were fed alike, and after an interval both were killed. The king's officers found that the heart of the captive lion was but one-tenth as large as that of his free companion, thus evidencing the degenerating influence of slavery. This is meant, no doubt, as a fable, though this fable, at least, is not without a moral. But the days of captivity are gone, and it may be hoped that Jewish large-heartedness has come back with the breath of freedom.

I. ABRAHAMS.

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